

Conference Commemorates 30th Anniversary of Women Students at Kings Point

By Martin Skrocki, Public Information Officer, USMMA

In the summer of 1974, the United States Merchant Marine Academy made headlines and history. Fifteen women, the first to ever attend a federal service academy, were enrolled as members of the freshman class. The other federal academies like West Point and Annapolis would not admit women for another two years.

On October 17 and 18, the Academy commemorated this milestone with a two-day conference, "Making a Difference: 30 Years of Women at Kings Point."

A goal of this event, according to Dr. Jane Brickman, head of the Humanities Department at the Academy and an advisor to women at the Academy for many years, was to have female graduates from the last 30 years meet with today's female students. "Through this interaction, our current women came to appreciate the issues and challenges that faced female students at Kings Point in the early years of the program," she said. "At the same time, our alumnae saw how far we've come since 1974."

The program began on October 17 with roundtable discussions of such topics as: Do women leaders face special challenges? Do women participate in the classroom equally with men? Could they be better prepared for going off to

sea? Is social life possible at the Academy? The discussions were followed by a dinner during which a number of guest speakers reflected on the experiences of women during different periods since 1974.

The program on October 18 began with the viewing of a special video about the admission of women to the Academy, produced by Susan Clark, Public Affairs Officer for MARAD. Three panel discussions followed, looking at the topics of women in seagoing careers, ashore in professional and academic pursuits, and balancing work and family.

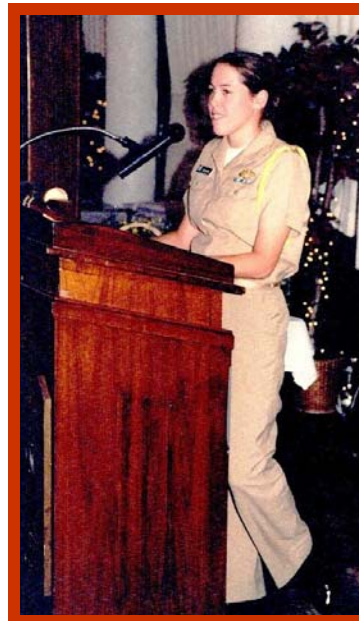
The conference closed with a luncheon for the Academy's entire Regiment of Midshipmen. The keynote speaker at the gathering was Maria Brooks, a documentary filmmaker from Oakland, Calif. Her current project is a film entitled, "Shipping Out: The Story of America's Seafaring Women."

Feedback from the conference was extremely positive. The participants enjoyed the opportunity to interact with each other and express their views and opinions. One thing was certain: the Academy will not wait another 30 years for the next such gathering!



Capt. Mary McWilliams, USCGR (Ret.), speaking to the alumnae about the problems and challenges that the first women faced at Kings Point.

Capt. McWilliams was the original advisor to women at the Academy from 1974 to 1976.



Midshipman Jacqueline McKoin speaking to the alumnae about women today at the Academy – what opportunities they have and what challenges they face.